

The Honorable Mayor Thomas M. Menino

State of the City Address

January 11, 2011

Prepared for Delivery

Senator Brown, Governor Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Murray, Treasurer Grossman, Auditor Bump, Senate President Murray, Speaker DeLeo, Sheriff Cabral, District Attorney Conley, distinguished guests, and fellow residents. Thank you for joining me tonight.

We are here to talk about Boston, but, let us take a moment to remember the shooting victims in Tucson. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families.

To my wife Angela, thank you for your love and support, and to my entire family, thank you.

To the City Council, and your new president Steve Murphy, thank you for your service.

One year ago, I stood here and laid out an ambitious innovation agenda. By so many measures, given all that we've faced, it's been a year full of progress. Like athletes who keep their lucky charms after winning games, I figured I would come back here in my knee brace once again. I thank everyone for your calls and support.

We gather in this cradle of liberty and thank our Armed Forces for protecting our freedoms. We also celebrate that a new day is here: that all men and women, regardless of their sexual orientation, can serve our great nation with pride.

We come together to take stock of where we stand and to plan for the days ahead. Even with the challenges behind us and the big ones that remain to tackle, I am relentlessly optimistic about 2011. I'm upbeat about our prospects, confident in our neighborhoods, and energized for the coming days.

Across Boston, we see signs of progress. New community health centers are under construction in Roxbury, East Boston and Mattapan. We invested \$5 million to improve the Brighton Branch Library. Liberty Mutual started work on their expanded headquarters. Soon, the state-of-the-art Kroc Center will open its doors in Uphams Corner.

As I said, we build on a year full of successes.

Last January, I laid out our innovation agenda and said first we would focus on schools. In the days since: we secured landmark education reform at the State House; made use of new authority to create in-district charters; put the best principals in struggling schools; made fresh teacher assignments in turnaround classrooms; and extended the school day in those buildings. We trained 2,200 more teachers to teach English learners. We launched our International Baccalaureate programs.

The results are paying off. Reading scores are up. Students taking algebra by grade 8 are up. Growth for students with disabilities is up. The drop-out-rate is the lowest level it's been in twenty years, and a higher percentage of students graduate from Boston Public Schools than at any time in our history! We are now one of the only cities taking responsibility for getting our students through college.

Last January, I said we'd focus on developing areas of our city where so much potential remained. In Downtown Crossing we have a Business Improvement District after multiple stalled efforts. Our three historic theaters are bustling with activity. Retailers are returning – 20 new ones opened last year and even more are coming. We refused to stand by as an anchor of this district lay bare. Our pressure at the Filene's site forced the owner to open up the process. I remain optimistic that a constructive next step lies in the near future. Downtown Crossing is again becoming a premier destination.

I also said last year that we'd begin to turn our South Boston waterfront into a job-creating Innovation District. Start-ups increasingly call the Innovation District home. Clean-tech companies are coming in clusters. The new real estate developments that will break ground next year have substantial innovation components. I said that our waterfront should not turn into "Anywhere USA." Instead, through creativity and some insistence, it's becoming a model for the country for how to rebuild the economy around new and growing industries.

Last January, I promised that we'd enhance the basics that make our neighborhoods work, adding a dose of technology and harnessing civic engagement. Our strategy of New Urban Mechanics is producing for our residents. Our smartphone App, Citizens Connect, and our universal student ID are making it easier for Bostonians to take part in their city. At our 24-hour call center, we handled 10,000 calls during the Blizzard of 2010, not to mention the 200,000 calls handled during the year. All enabled by technology, but staffed by people. I want to recognize three of the call-takers here with us: Elizabeth, Dave, and Rocco. Nothing speaks more about the kind of government we believe in than their opening line: "Mayor's hotline, how can I help you?"

Last year, I said we had to deal with new financial realities. And we did. We streamlined operations; closed a \$40 million budget gap at the city; and maintained strong credit, allowing us to invest in our neighborhoods.

In Boston this year, we continued to see unending displays of hard work, and uncommon acts of devotion. As just one example, when the earthquake struck Haiti one year ago tomorrow, Boston rallied around our Haitian friends to help them recover. And we stand with them still.

We've made great strides amidst deep challenges. Boston was named the number 3 city for business. We were the number 2 metro area for job growth; the 2nd healthiest city; number one digital city in America; and the number one city for innovation for the second year in a row.

Across so many fronts, the state of our city is exceptionally strong and resilient!

However, there remain exceptions to that great strength, and this is what we focus on today. As some of us experience more opportunity and more prosperity, some in our city will endure more hardship. As many of us look forward with great hope, some in our city will wonder where to find it.

I believe that true progress should be shared widely.

Working for all of our people is my passion. I believe that a strong middle class is the great engine of our city. To our struggling workers, our concerned parents, our anxious seniors: I will go to work every day to make sure this recovery comes to you, too.

So, as we move out of this recession, job one will be making sure that Bostonians who still don't have work, can find it. Jobs are the greatest equalizer. Jobs are the path to family success and opportunity. Even as Congress steps back from stimulus efforts, we must not. In Boston, we'll expand our own green stimulus by launching a \$100 million program to make our public assets more energy efficient. We'll generate 1,000 jobs and support this new work with savings from avoided energy costs.

And we won't stop there. Knowing bureaucracy shouldn't stand in the way of job creation, we'll cut outdated and redundant permits. We'll reduce red tape for small businesses, the ultimate job engine.

Easing inequities also means continuing to reduce disparities in health care. Boston is home to the world's best health care resources, yet some residents still do not share in the miracles performed here. Meanwhile, community health centers operate where people live, they are at the forefront of health issues, and they provide excellent care. So, we'll launch Neighbor Care. Neighbor Care will increase the use of community health centers – providing more hours and more services in the neighborhoods. I am asking our Public Health Commission to team up with hospitals, health insurance companies, and the community health centers to help the centers extend their hours and access.

America's first community health center was established on Dorchester's Columbia's Point. A long tradition across the city continues to this day. Azzie Young, from the Mattapan Community Health Center is here tonight. So is Frederica Williams of the Whittier Street Health Center. They and their counterparts will lead again as we make sure our city's tremendous healthcare resources reach all of our people.

While some in Congress now seek to limit access to health care. In Boston, we remember what a good man told us: healthcare is a right, not a privilege.

Real recovery will also mean a full recovery to our sense of safety and respect for life. Violent crime is down for the fourth year in a row. But criminal acts in pockets of our city and the tragic increase in murders impact us all. I expect recent strategies by Boston Police will continue to drive down crime and turnaround the trend in homicides. I am pleased 71 recruits now at the Police Academy will join the force this year and increase visibility on the streets. And I'm glad to announce that we will add a second class of recruits this summer.

We will also expand our re-entry efforts. The new CORI law opened the door for successful re-entry. Now we must press for the jobs and training opportunities needed to fulfill the promise of this legislation.

In addition, I am directing Boston Police to work with the ATF on a new anti-gun task force. In Boston and around the country, we've seen too much mayhem from the wrong guns in the wrong hands.

Let us also make sure educational opportunity is shared across the city. We'll continue with our aggressive education reform efforts. Turning around underperforming schools is the best way to provide great schools in every neighborhood. It lays the groundwork for us to tackle changes to student assignment. But we can't stop there.

Full-day school for four-year olds has proven to be successful. Even in these tough budget times, we must find a way to expand the reach of early education for those who need it most. Recently, our PILOT task force laid out a formula for the city's non-profits to provide funding and services in lieu of taxes. A top priority for new commitments will be early education in the Circle of Promise. With private, public, and non-profit partners, I believe we can double the seats for four-year olds in the next five years. If we do this, we'll also create more openings across the city for all parents of young children.

There should be just one education agenda in Boston. There should be just one mission that we all get behind: The kids are going to learn.

Let me address one final disparity. The difference between what we pay for city employee health care costs and what we can afford, what private sector neighbors get, and what the State provides to its employees.

In this economy, it's tough enough for our neighbors to cover their own healthcare costs. We should not ask them to cover the vast majority of ours.

Our budget challenges next year will be as harsh as they have ever been. Our healthcare costs are an enormous strain on an already grim financial situation. Boston taxpayers pay 82 percent of health care costs for most City employees. In total, our healthcare costs will reach nearly 300 million dollars next year.

The State pays 67 percent of healthcare costs for new employees. If Boston had the same plan design, we could save one million dollars a month. To put into early education. And job training. And neighborhood improvements. And summer jobs.

Municipal union leaders can make this right at the negotiating table. The City Council can make this right by approving my home rule petition for a Boston version of the state's Group Insurance Commission. The State can make this right by granting us the power they gave themselves.

We in government should stay mindful of our neighbors who are struggling to keep a job or to find one.

As we navigate 2011, let us make sure the recovery we have is a recovery for all of our people, that our progress is shared widely. This isn't just morally right – though it is. It's not just how I was raised – though it was. And it's not just the way I've tried to lead our city, always balancing interests – though I have. It's also the issue of our time. Growing inequalities now threaten to divide our great nation and its great cities. We won't have all of the solutions in Boston, but we can start here. Many other great journeys have.

In Boston, 2011 will be a great year. You can feel it in the energy of our people, in the way your imagination is again set on pushing us ahead. It will be the year of our recovery. And the year we too decided not just to come back, but to come back better.

God bless our great city and all of our residents.

Thank you and good evening.